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THE FRENCH AND ENGLISH MILITARY SYSTEMS AND THEIR BEARINGS UPON AN ADEQUATE AMERICAN POLICY¹

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THE modern army has certain features that completely differentiate it from the army of the past. Of these we need here to mention but one: its method of recruiting its forces. This method, taking its origin in the distress of Prussia after Jena, has been followed by all considerable nations but two, and has now become the head of the corner. It rests upon the principle that military service is an obligation due the country and that it is, or should be, universal. Keeping in view then the recent increase of interest in matters military in our own land, we may announce that if we would put our house in order, we must in some fashion or other follow the example set abroad, not because it is foreign, but because it is right.

It would be natural, perhaps, at first blush, to go to Germany for our model, for in this land the system of universal service first took form and has reached its highest development. But for some reasons this model would not serve our purpose. We need perhaps not only an example, a model, but also an inspiration. We must look for a people that has voluntarily accepted universal service, by its own expressed will, rather than for a people upon whom this condition has been thrust, upon whom rests an obligation in the attainment of ends with which it might conceivably not sympathize. These conditions limit us to France. And at the same time we must set over against France, the system, if it be a system, that has prevailed in Great Britain, not only for the sake of contrast involved, but also and more, because in Great Britain we can

¹ Read by title at the afternoon meeting of the Academy of Political Science on May 18, 1916.

see ourselves. For Great Britain and the United States form the exceptions already mentioned, of peoples who blind, or have blinded, themselves to the necessity of preparation for defense.

In France, military service is universal and obligatory. If we ponder the meaning of these words, we shall see that not only is the conception of military service democratic, falling alike on rich and poor, illustrious and obscure, high-born and lowly, but also that it is a lofty conception. For this service is regarded not as a compulsion, something forced upon the individual by an authority outside of his own being, but as an obligation, a duty. It is a condition imposed by the people itself upon itself, and for a distinct purpose. And that purpose is the only one that can form any justification whatsoever for the existence of a national army, namely, the defense of the country, the maintenance of its rights, and the protection of its honor. It is important to bear this in mind, for although France is, and has been for years, one of the great military states, yet under no circumstances can it be charged with militarism.

Bismarck is quoted as saying that he had made but two mistakes in the Franco-Prussian war: he had overrated the French army, and underrated the French people. Were he alive to-day, he could repeat neither the mistake nor the statement, for the French people is the army, and the army is the people, and this by its own decision. The French army is of the people, by the people and for the people, and is therefore held in affection by the people. Of its officers, one-third come from the ranks, the remainder from the military schools. As promotion is partly by selection, it naturally came about that the trained graduate of the Polytechnique or St. Cyr had some advantage over his less fortunate comrades. Accordingly, the principle of the "unity of origin" was some years ago announced, under which accepted candidates for Polytechnique or St. Cyr, before entering these schools, must serve one year in the ranks. Obviously this does not equalize advantages, but it at least gives every graduate a real knowledge of life in the ranks.

Democratic as are the foundations of military service, discipline has not suffered. There is no risk in saying that French officers respect their men, and conversely. Indeed the point of view is the same; they are both serving France, each in his own place. This community of views is but the outward and visible sign of a community of interest, growing out of the conviction prevailing during these past few years, that sooner or later, and sooner rather than later, all Frenchmen would be called upon to make a supreme effort to save their land. It is certain further that the existence of a great army has not given birth in France to ambition of military conquest or aggrandizement. No one can assert that the international policy of France has been conditioned by a consciousness of military strength. In no other country are peace and tranquillity so fervently cherished, the desire so strong to live on terms of amity with ones' neighbors. We may even declare that the French people have regretted the necessity of a great army, but that under the stress of necessity regrets have given away to action.

If we cross the channel, we come upon a wholly different state of affairs. Great Britain had at the outbreak of the war a regular army, that is, a professional army in which service was voluntary, not obligatory. Separated from the Continent by the "silver streak" and depending for defense upon her navy, universal service as an obligation due the state made no appeal to her appreciation of the necessities of the case. But after entering upon the Entente with France, it began to be felt that possibly some part would have to be taken in a future continental struggle, but that this part would not call for great numbers. Hence the resolution to prepare an expeditionary force for continental necessities; by keeping out of entangling alliances, and trusting to her mighty navy for imperial defense, her little regular army would be adequate to occasional little wars in various parts of the Empire and she need go no farther on the road of preparation. In some high quarters this view found no favor. For years it had been evident to some men of foresight, chief among them Lord Roberts, that the measures taken would prove insufficient, and that

universal service would have to be adopted. Pleas to this end, however, fell on deaf ears; there would be no great war, or if there were, England would not be involved, or if involved, the expeditionary force would meet all requirements.

Other things equal, we may find in England's military policy, in the principles of her military organization, substantially what we have in our own land in respect of these matters. Like us, she draws her officers from military schools, from civil life and, in very small numbers, from the ranks. Again, her army is a thing apart from the nation; the idea that military service is an obligation to the state, necessary in certain cases to the very existence of the state, had, before the war, not only never flourished, but had never taken root. Nothing would be gained now by pushing the comparison further home; what we have to consider is the possibility of applying to our own needs the experience of others.

Let us clear the ground by declaring that military service in our land, should it be found necessary, ought not to be called compulsory. This word sounds ill in our ears, and moreover is inaccurate. It is a far cry from the conception of military service as a subjective obligation honoring each man, to the objective reality of compulsion thrust upon us by external authority. One of these calls upon our higher being, the other is repugnant to our prejudices. Service that is a duty, national training, preparation for the national defense, whatever we may choose to call it, this appeals to us; the other term connotes conscription, and by so much would convert honorable duty into a mechanical act.

Obviously the example of England, under normal conditions, is valuable to us only in so far as it may help us in the future to cure our own radical defects. The case changes somewhat if we turn to France, for here we have a republic, a military republic if we choose, organized as such for defense, but uninspired by either military ambition or the desire of aggrandizement at any one else's expense. Under pressure similar to that of our sister republic, we should have to make a similar effort, and introduce universal military service. Nothing less would serve, because anything less would be

undemocratic, that is to say, unjust. But we are not yet quite ready to admit similar pressure, that is, we are tempted to turn aside when universal service is mentioned. Nevertheless we must recognize the necessity of some alteration for the better, in order not to be caught naked and helpless. We must at all costs avoid the calamity of having to raise, equip, arm, supply, drill, discipline, and officer our armies after war shall be upon us. If we could make up our minds today to introduce universal service the matter would in theory be simple. But this implies an education, a mental training that is almost lacking in our economy. Apparently then our first task should be to lead our people to see the necessity of it by themselves.

But even so, the practical difficulties next to be overcome would be enormous. For example, suppose 1,000,000 young men annually reached military age; how could we train them? We have not the officers or non-commissioned officers for the purpose. Evidently then one of our first needs would be the formation of a corps of officers. The lack of such a body has apparently been one of England's difficulties in the present war.

Arms and equipment and supplies, the organization behind these and other material elements are however just as much needed as officers; we must furnish them, and what is more, create in time of peace, a system by which they may be provided in increasing volume in time of war. One thing is plain, the modern army—that is, the conversion of the potential energy of an entire people to military purposes at a moment's notice—is not a matter of mere resolution. It is on the contrary the resultant of much effort spread over many years—the result of growth; in short, an evolution.

The example of France shows us that the maintenance of great forces for reasons understood by the people, and by it approved, is compatible with the highest ideals of personal and national liberty, nay, may be the sole condition under which these ideals shall persist. England's example at least suggests the distress that may overwhelm us if we neglect the conditions. It is for us to choose. Of one thing we may be certain: it takes two to keep the peace; liberty is ours only so long as we are willing and prepared to fight for it.